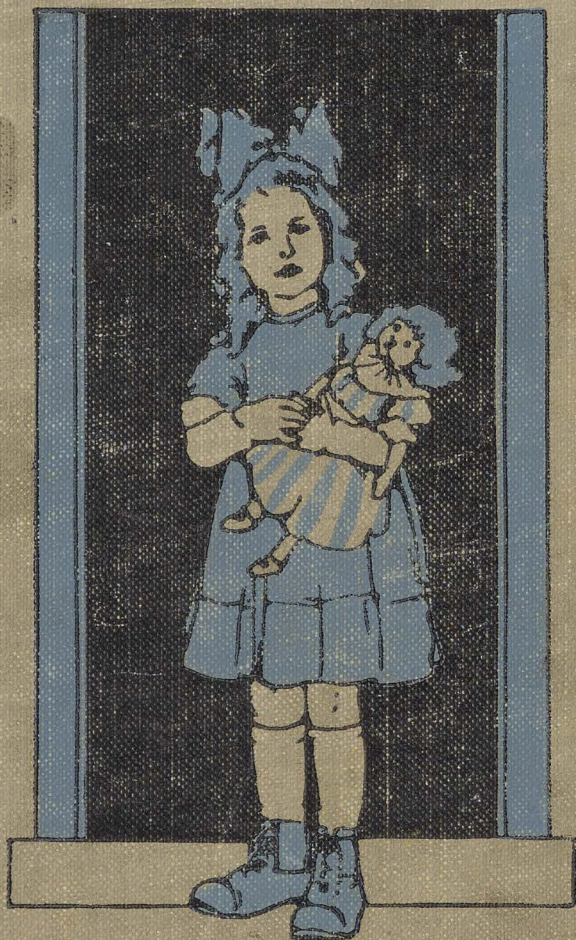


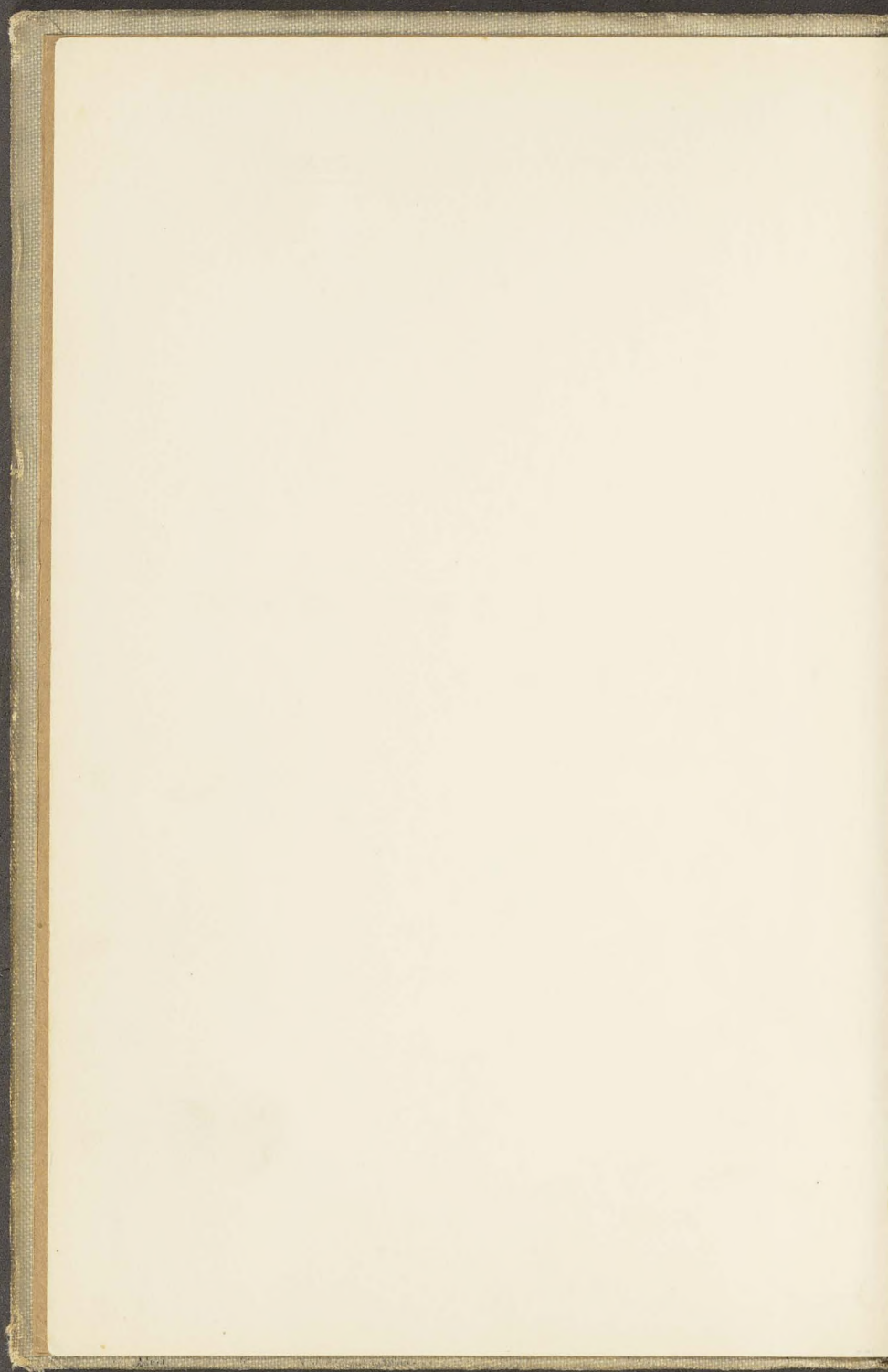
*Polly and
the
Wishing Ring
Johnson*



The Opening Door Series



Mrs. Reinbold



THE OPENING DOOR SERIES

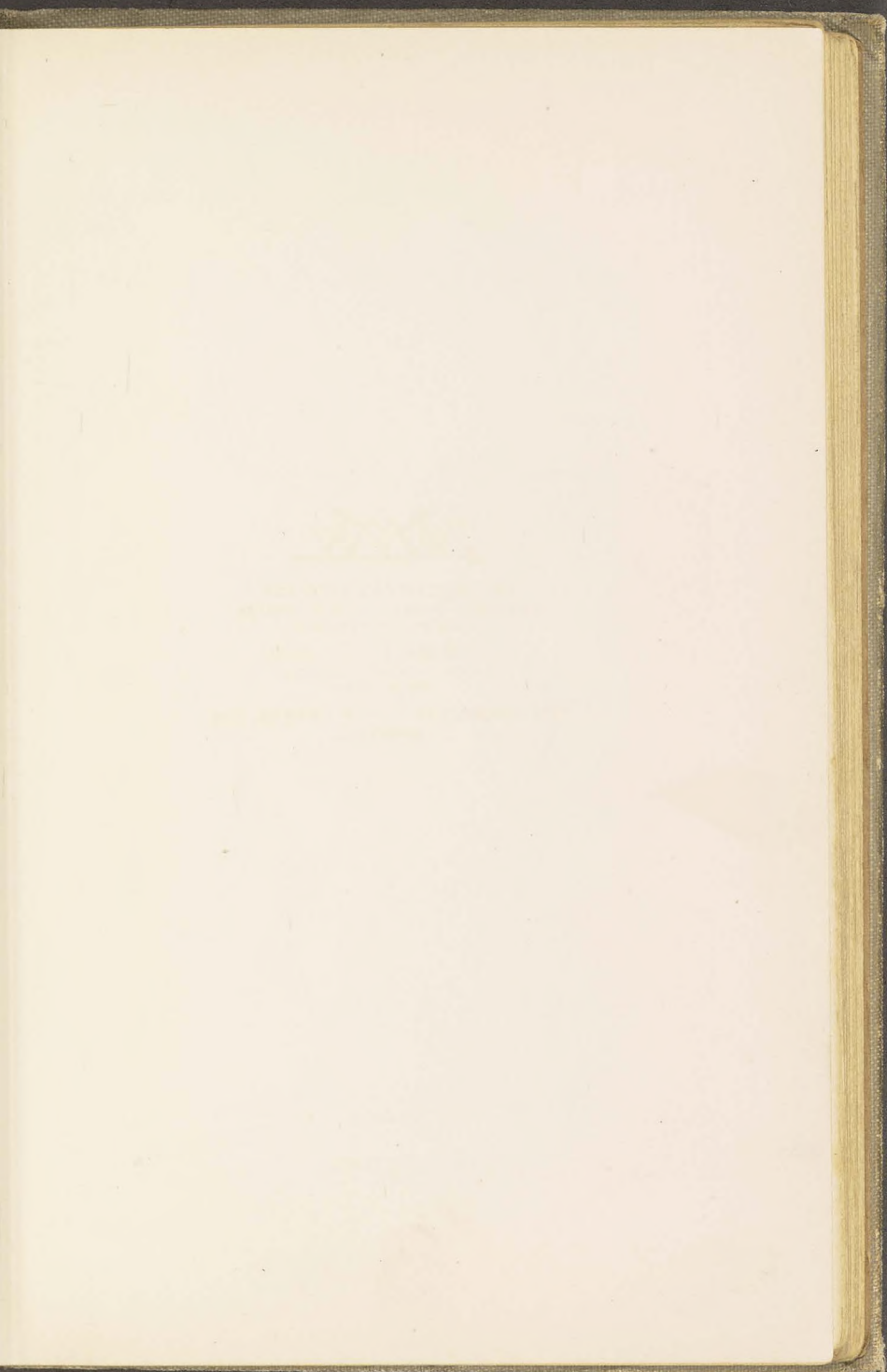
POLLY AND THE WISHING RING

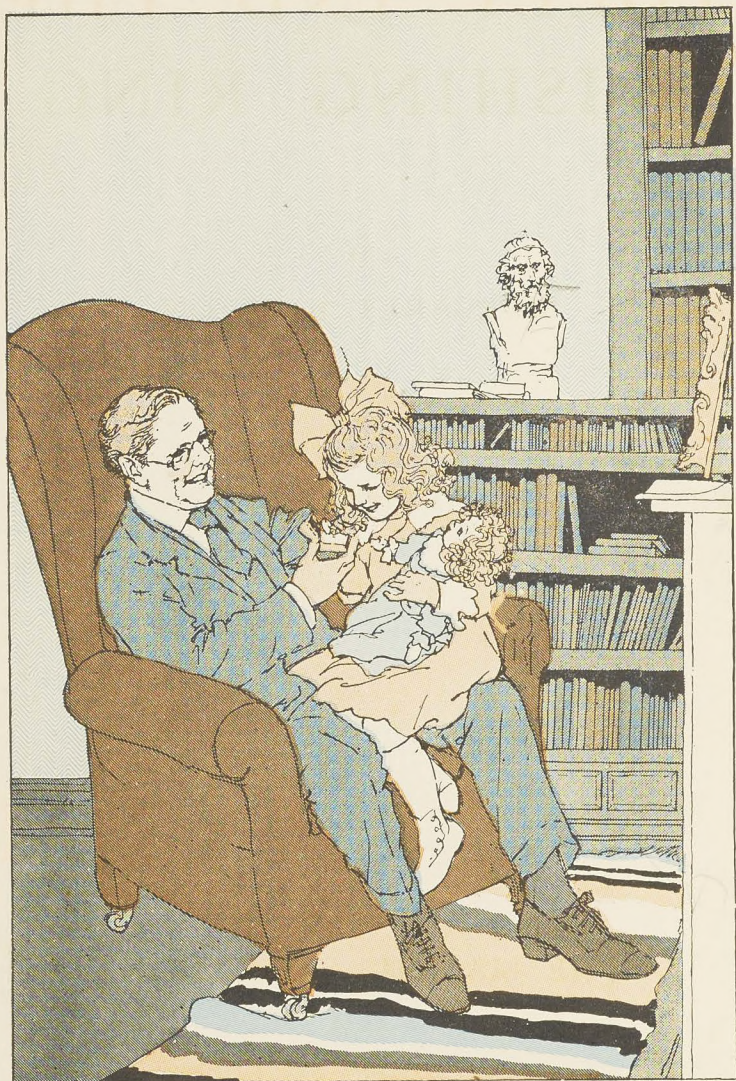


THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK • BOSTON • CHICAGO • DALLAS
ATLANTA • SAN FRANCISCO

MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED
LONDON • BOMBAY • CALCUTTA
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO





“Oh!” cried Polly. “Its a *darling* ring!”

JSL
00052199

POLLY AND THE WISHING RING

BY
MARGARET JOHNSON

ILLUSTRATED BY
WILLY POGÁNY

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1924

All rights reserved

COPYRIGHT, 1918,
By THE MACMILLAN COMPANY.

Set up and electrotyped. Published September, 1918.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

PREFACE

THERE are those who believe, or pretend that they do, that the days of magic are over in this old world of ours,—that miracles are no longer wrought, and that charms and enchantments have lost their power over the hearts and destinies of human folk.

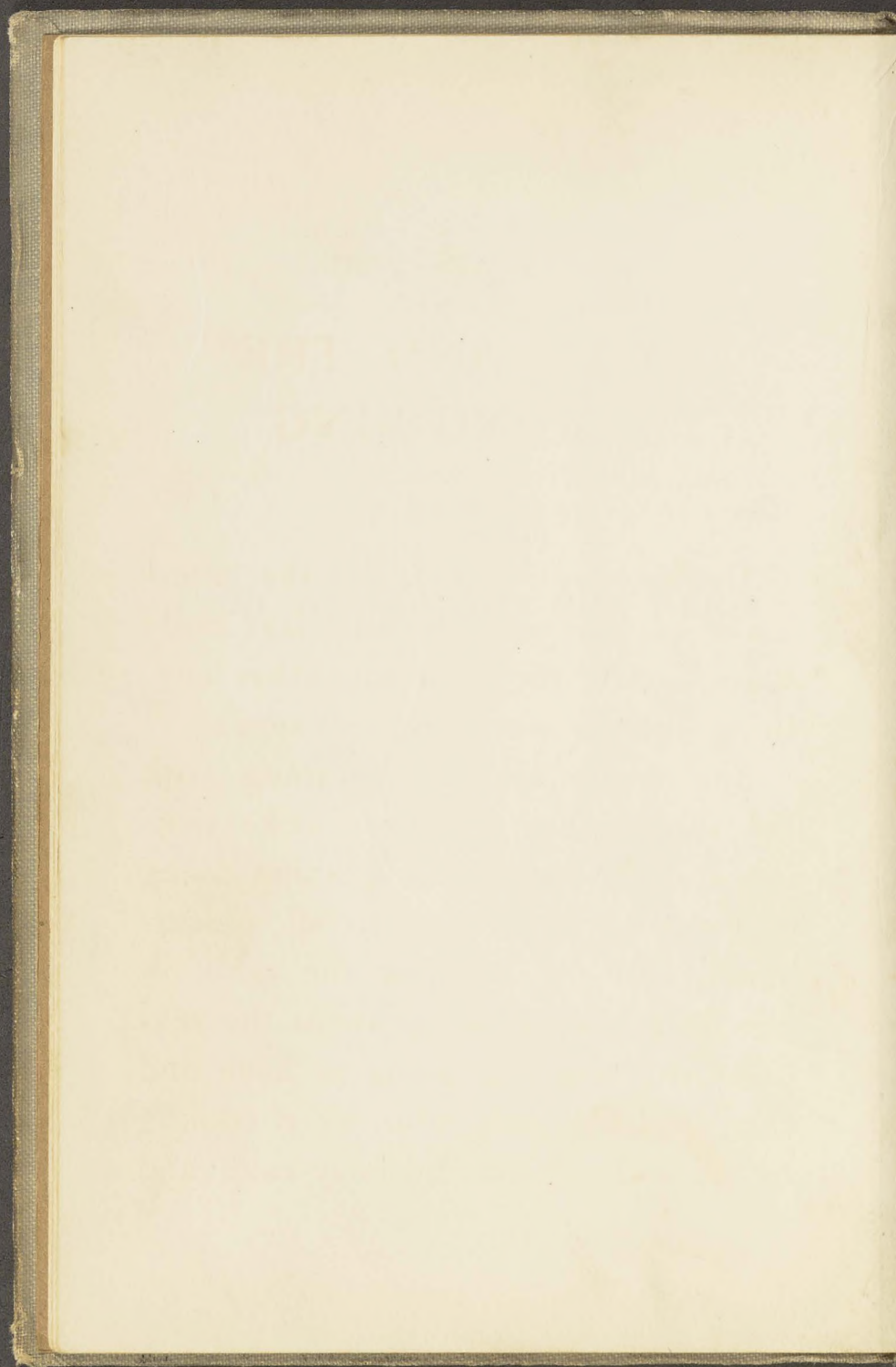
These wise people shrewdly observe that everything is accomplished nowadays by commonsense and matter-of-fact methods, strictly in accordance with the scientific laws of Life. They do not see that, wrapped up in these very laws, as a rose is wrapped in its calyx, are the mysterious and wonder-working powers of magic.

Polly Blair could enlighten such people. She learned—and she was only seven—that just as surely as the rosebud opens at the touch of the sun and changes from a hard green bead to a glowing, full-blown flower, just so surely may just as wonderful things happen to a little girl's thoughts and feelings, and even to her life and the lives of other people around her, at the touch of a suggestion charged with the magical power of Love. A look at a certain twinkling little blue stone, or the saying of a certain enchanted rhyme, and presto, behold! all that power

comes instantly to her aid; the evil spirits of discontent and anger and sorrow are driven out, and the bright ones of happiness and peace are charmed in their stead.

Do you think, O you matter-of-fact people, that these things could have been,—that Polly could have become so contented in her strange new home, that she would have been able to soften the heart of the terrible Miss Minns, to help Lucy and to save No-reen,—if she had not worn upon her finger and carried in her heart the secret of the Magic Ring?

POLLY AND THE WISHING RING



POLLY AND THE WISHING-RING

CHAPTER I

UP to five o'clock in the afternoon of her seventh birthday Polly Blair hadn't the least idea that anything unusual was going to happen.

She woke up that morning with the sun shining and the clocks ticking and the old world spinning along just the same as ever, to all appearances, and she lay just the same in her little bed, thinking about the tea-party that she was going to have and the six little girls who were coming to it, and of her birthday-cake and

its seven pink candles, and of Father and Mother and Aunt Sue and Uncle Bob and all the presents that they were going to give her; and then Maggie came in just as usual, and dressed her and tied her and buttoned her and brushed her and prinked up two big pink bows on the top of her head. And the flowers on the window-sill nodded at her, and the dolls sat round the sides of the room and smiled at her, precisely as if they were all going to keep on forever, just like that.

Even Rose-Marie, the best-beloved of all the dolls, looked at her just exactly the same out of her lovely blue eyes, and breathed not a word of what was probably getting ready to happen at that very minute. So

Polly kissed her and ran downstairs, just as usual, to have breakfast with Father and Mother in the sunny dining-room at the little round table set for three.

Just as they got up from the table, Dr. Donald came in.

“Hello, little birthday lady!” he said. “How now, Father, you coughing again? What about that little vacation in the sunny South I ordered you to take?”

“Vacation?” asked Father. He looked at Mother, and they both looked at the doctor, and then they all three strolled away together into the library.

But Polly ran upstairs just as usual and dressed Rose-Marie and the other dolls for the party; and by and by

she and Mother had luncheon together, and then they too were dressed for the party, and Mother looked like a rose in her softly-shimmering green gown, and Polly like a pale little bud in her white one, for Polly was rather a pale little girl.

“We must get some roses into these cheeks!” said Mother, pinching them softly as she and Polly went downstairs together.

The party was just as usual, too, from the presents that the little girls brought Polly when they came, to the pretty popping crackers that they pulled after supper. But while they were at supper the unusual things began to happen.

Father came home unexpectedly with a strange gentleman, and Mother

was called away from the tea-table and never came back. Aunt Sue and Uncle Bob came and looked in at the children and smiled and went away again; and Dr. Donald came, and a messenger-boy with a yellow telegram. Once when Polly was passing through the hall she heard Uncle Bob say to Mother, "It will make a little woman of her, Sylvia!" And Mother answered with a little laugh and a catch in her voice, "Oh, I don't know whether I want my baby to be a little woman, Bob!" And Polly wondered if they were talking about her. But never a thing did she know about what was going on till the party was all over.

Skipping in from the steps, where she had stood to see the children off, she met the messenger-boy coming

out, and after him Dr. Donald and the strange gentleman. And as she went on she saw Nora swooping the dishes off the supper-table, and Mother and Aunt Sue running upstairs with Katy scurrying after them, and Father and Uncle Bob clapping on their hats and rushing out of the back door to the garage.

“What is it? What are they all doing?” cried Polly, running into the dining-room.

“Whist, darlin’!” said Nora, throwing up her hands. “An’ don’t ask *me!*”

So upstairs flew Polly, and there she found Aunt Sue, in Mother’s room, turning Mother’s bureau-drawers inside out, and piling the things helter-skelter on the bed.

“What is it? Where’s Mother?”

What are they all doing?" cried Polly, again; and Aunt Sue never stopped her work any more than as if Polly'd been a fly! "O Polly dear!" she said. "Mother's up in the attic. She meant to tell you herself, but we haven't a minute to spare, you see, because they have to start the first thing in the morning. Father's had such a wonderful chance to go to South America and look after a mine down there, and the doctor says it will be the best thing in the world for him, and he'll come back all strong and well,—and Mother's going, too, to take care of him!"

"And me, too?" cried Polly.

"O no, dear!" said Aunt Sue.

"You're going to Madame Larue."

She might just as well have said "to

the moon" for all Polly understood about that!

"Where's Madame Larue?" she asked, with a great lump coming in her throat.

"She isn't a place!" laughed Aunt Sue. "She's a person, a teacher, and she has a school at Wayburne, where Mother and I both went when we were little girls."

"But I don't want to go to school!" cried Polly, desperately. "I want to stay with you, Aunt Sue!"

"Bless you, dear!" said Aunt Sue. "I wish I could have you! But I'm going to spend the winter in Washington, taking care of Grandmamma, and Uncle Bob hasn't any home of his own, and this house has to be shut up, and —"

“O Polly darling!” cried Mother, coming in just then with her arms full. She dropped the things in a heap on the floor and caught Polly in her arms and hugged her tight, with the bright tears spilling over her eyes and her lips smiling. “We must be very happy, dear, about Father!” she said. “It won’t be long, Polly,— oh, it won’t be long! And Madame Larue is a dear woman. I can trust my little Polly with her!”

“Trust her!” echoed Uncle Bob, standing in the door. “Why, Polly’ll have the time of her life! Here, Peter wants to know what to do with the trunks. Clear the way, everybody! We’ve got to get these people off our hands first, and then we’ll see what *we’re* going to do, Polly Wogg!”

Polly could not speak. She slipped out of Mother's arms, and while Peter came bumping up with the trunks and everybody was rushing to and fro and running into everybody else and giving orders and contradicting them the next minute, she went away downstairs by herself.

Polly knew that Father was what is called a mining engineer. It was his business to go to far-away places where the hidden treasures of copper and silver and iron lay deep within the earth, and to run the mines that brought up these treasures from their bed. Polly loved to hear him tell about his adventures in the far, strange places where he went. But before he had always gone alone, and she and Mother had waited for him at home.

Now,—well, it was all very fine for the sun to pretend to be setting just as usual, a round golden ball in the west, and the clocks to be ticking and the old world spinning along just the same as ever! Polly knew better.

She did not cry, though the lump felt fearfully big and choky in her throat. Through the dining-room door she saw Rose-Marie still sitting in her place at the head of the doll's tea-table, and she ran and caught her up with a great sob.

“There's nobody left but just you and me, Rose-Marie!” she cried. “Everybody's going away, and everything's spoiled, and O Rose-Marie dear, what do you suppose we're ever going to do!”

CHAPTER II

WHAT they would have done, either of them, just then, I don't know, if it hadn't been for Uncle Bob. But just as the lump in Polly's throat was turning into big tears that certainly would have rolled down her cheeks in another minute, in he came gayly, just as if he had known all the time exactly what was going to happen.

"Look here, Polly Wogg," he said, "they don't seem to want me any more upstairs. They say I'm right under their feet, and everybody's falling over me all the time, and it's too early for supper, and couldn't you

come and talk to me for a little while?"

"Yes, I could," said Polly, winking very hard. And Uncle Bob picked her up, Rose-Marie and all, and carried her into the library and sat down in a big chair with her on his knee and Rose-Marie on *her* knee. There was a little fire on the hearth, for the September evening was cool, and the fire and Uncle Bob's knee and his arms around her were so very comfortable that Polly began to feel better before she knew it.

"I'm glad to see you so cheerful, Polly," Uncle Bob began, just as if she'd been a grown-up person. "It's very important for us all to be cheerful, you know, on Father's account. He might lose all the good of his

journey if he should see anybody crying or feeling bad. And there isn't anything to feel bad about, anyway, for he'll be back in no time — simply no time at all. Let's see, this is September, — fall, winter, spring, summer, — zip! there you are — year all over, Father and Mother home, everything lovely!"

He held Polly a little closer, and she put her head down on his shoulder and laughed faintly.

"You'll love it at Madame Larue's," Uncle Bob went on. "She's almost as nice as Mother." Polly shook her head vigorously against his arm. "Well, I said *almost*, didn't I?" protested Uncle Bob.

"Is she very old?" ventured Polly, lifting her face a very little.

"Bless you, no!" Uncle Bob laughed

till his glasses fell off his nose. "She's quite young and handsome, Madame Larue is. And there's Miss Dora, you know, her daughter, as charming a young lady as I ever met. And the girls — well, you know what fun a nice lot of girls have together. A dozen or so of them in the house, I believe, and all older than you, but —"

"How do you know, Uncle Bob?" asked Polly, lifting her face a little farther.

"Oh! Hum — ha, — well," Uncle Bob rubbed his head and looked so guilty that Polly had to laugh again in spite of herself.

"Well, the fact is," he said at last, "we had an idea that this little trip of your father's might come off some day, though we didn't think it would

be so soon; so your mother wrote to Madame Larue and asked her if she'd take one small girl, age seven, size three-and-a-half, and Madame Larue said she would, and so it's all settled, and you're going to have no end of fun going off with your trunks, you and Rose-Marie. Rose-Marie has a trunk, hasn't she? Well, we'll see to that the first thing in the morning. You'll want to take all your birthday presents to show the girls — Good gracious me! If I wasn't near forgetting the present I had for you myself!"

Polly sat up straight. "A birthday present?" she cried.

"Sure-lee!" said Uncle Bob. He shifted her from one knee to the other and slapped himself all over to feel if the present was in his pockets.

“Now where in the world — Aha! here we are!”

He brought out triumphantly a very small square package done up in white paper. Inside the paper was a little box, and inside the box, in a white velvet bed, was a beautiful little gold ring with a winking blue stone in it.

“Oh!” cried Polly, enraptured. “It’s a *darling* ring, Uncle Bob!”

“Glad you like it,” said Uncle Bob. “I thought it was a pretty nice ring myself. And it’s magic, you know. Hold on! Don’t do that!” he cried out in alarm, for Polly had taken out the ring and was just going to put it on her finger. “That’s a wishing-ring!”

He nodded at Polly in such a solemn

and mysterious way that she stopped, fascinated. "A wishing-ring?" she repeated.

"A ring to make wishes on," explained Uncle Bob. "If it's properly wished on your finger, that ring will bring you all the happiness you want. The little blue eye is a bit of blue sky, you see, and as long as everything is going smoothly, you just let it shine all by itself. Say

'Twinkle, twinkle, little ring,
How I wonder what you'll bring!'

like that, every morning. But in time of need — that's when things look sort of black and blue and don't know what to do — then you shut your eyes, think of somebody you love, turn the ring round three times, and say

‘Wishing-ring,
Sunshine bring!’

Then you open your eyes, look sharp, and zip! you’ll see something to be happy about.”

“Always?” asked Polly.

“Always,” declared Uncle Bob. “It’s sure to be there, only you’ve got to look for it, see? And one more thing—in the time of greatest need, if you wish for him, the knight of the ring is bound to come to your rescue.”

Polly laughed with delight. “Is that you?” she asked.

“That’s me,” said Uncle Bob. “Father and Mother will be too far away, and Aunt Sue will be up to her ears taking care of Grandmamma, but you send a summons to your Uncle Bob—I mean the knight of the ring—

and he'll appear. Only once, remember, and at exactly the right time, the time of greatest need."

"But when will that be?" cried Polly. "How shall I know?"

Uncle Bob shook his head. "That will be for you to decide," he answered mysteriously, "and we'll see how good a guess you can make. Now who would you rather should wish the ring on than any one else in the world?"

"Mother," said Polly instantly.

"Exactly!" cried Uncle Bob. "The very person I should have chosen myself. Mother will put it on for you, and — Hullo, what's this?"

"This" was Maggie, coming in to get Polly and give her some supper and put her to bed.

"I'm not sleepy," protested Polly;

but her mouth opened in a big yawn as she spoke, and Uncle Bob sent her away with a laugh.

He went upstairs with her afterward, and put the little box in her hand when he kissed her good-night, and Mother wished the ring on for her before she went to sleep.

“Good-night, my Pollikins,” said Father, hugging her very tight. “Be a good girl and mind everything that Madame Larue says, and I’ll bring you a jumping giraffe and some purple porcupine’s quills when I come back from South America.”

“I’ll bring you something prettier than that!” laughed Mother. “Go away, Father!”

Then they had a long talk together, Polly and Mother, and Mother ex-

plained everything, and promised to write very often, and never to forget her little daughter for a single minute. And then at last she took the ring out of the box and put it on Polly's finger.

"I had a wishing-ring, too, when I went to school," she told Polly. "My mother wished it on for me, and this is what she said."

The blue stone winked and twinkled in the light and in Polly's sleepy eyes, as Mother's soft voice went on :

"This the magic ring will do,
Make you happy, keep you true,
Love has wished it on for you !"

"Love has wished it on for you," murmured Polly, and then her eyes closed and she was fast asleep.

CHAPTER III

THE next few days flew by on wings, and in simply no time, as Uncle Bob would have said, Polly was sitting in the train on her way to school, with Rose-Marie in her arms and the wishing-ring on her finger.

Polly and Uncle Bob had started for Wayburne that morning. Uncle Bob was to go as far as Digby Junction, and there one of the teachers from the Maples was to meet Polly and take her the rest of the way, while Uncle Bob took a train back to New York.

Polly had been so busy that she had hardly had time to realize what had hap-

pened to her. Every time she thought there was going to be a chance for her to sit down and be dismal, — every time she felt that queer, quivery feeling inside that meant “I’m going away all by myself to Madame Larue’s,” — just at that minute somebody seemed to need her for something right on the spot. She had to go to buy a hat, or to try on a coat, or to decide whether Rose-Marie should wear the blue dress or the pink one for the journey, or which story-book to take and which to leave at home; and among all these distracting questions the quivery feeling had no chance at all. Aunt Sue sewed and shopped and packed for Polly, and Uncle Bob popped in every day after breakfast and when he came home from town at night, and every

time he came he brought some contribution to Polly's outfit.

One time it was the funniest, fiercest little watch-dog made of china. "To guard you," he explained gravely, "when you go to walk in the wilds of Wayburne." Another time it was a little bow and arrow, that might come in handy in case of Indians, and again a woolly lamb with the most plaintive of baa's, to melt the heart of a terrible teacher.

"There won't be any terrible teachers, Uncle Bob," protested Polly. But Uncle Bob shook his head. "You never can tell," he said. "Best be on the safe side!"

There was a big calendar, on which Polly could mark off the days and see how fast they flew, and a cunning red

journal, and best of all, a beautiful little silver watch to wear on her wrist.

The watch came the very day when they started on their journey. It had been a dark and cloudy morning, and at the last moment Aunt Sue opened the trunks and got out raincoats for Polly and Rose-Marie. It sprinkled when they reached New York, rained gently when they took the train for Wayburne, and was coming down in bucketfuls now on the car roof and past the dismal little station at Digby Junction.

For the last half hour Polly's heart had been going down deeper and deeper into her little boots. She watched Uncle Bob's wet umbrella go bobbing round the corner of the station, her eyes clinging to him as if they never could let go. But in a minute he was

back again with a yellow envelope in his hand.

“What do you think, Polly Wogg,” he cried, “Miss Dora missed her train! But she’ll meet you at Wayburne, sure. It’s only a little way, and the conductor will look after you, and if I don’t get that train back to New York there’ll be all kinds of ructions down at the office, so do you mind, honey, if I leave you here?”

O dear me, what could Polly say! Her heart was fairly in her little toes by this time. But there was no time to think. “All right, Uncle Bob,” she managed to say, and away he went, with a word to the conductor, who looked grumpy enough, Polly thought, at the door. On the platform he turned and made a merry face at Polly,

which she saw through a blur of rain and tears; and then the train had moved off and he was gone.

That was a desperate moment indeed! But Polly bethought herself, just in time, of the ring.

“Wishing-ring,
Sunshine bring!”

She said it in a choky little whisper, turning the ring round three times and thinking of Mother.

Someway, just thinking of Mother was a great comfort. Mother was thinking of her, too. Mother loved her. All the miles of distance in the world could not change that! “Look sharp,” Uncle Bob had said, “and zip, you’ll see something to be happy about!” Polly opened her eyes resolutely.

“Maybe it’s because I’m all safe and

warm in this car, and not out there in the rain," she thought. "And maybe it's because I have Rose-Marie for company, and because this seat is so nice and jouncy, and the conductor is looking after me, even if he is cross and can't see me except out of the back of his head!"

She was so amused by this idea that she smiled to herself, and picked up Rose-Marie to give her a little hug. And the next minute she looked up and saw Noreen.

Noreen had got into the train at Digby Junction and she was sitting right across the aisle from Polly. She was about thirteen years old, and she had the blackest hair and the brightest eyes and the deepest dimples that Polly had ever seen.

"What a beautiful doll!" she exclaimed, as soon as she saw Polly's blue eyes smiling over the top of Rose-Marie's hat. "May I come over and see it?" And in two minutes she was sitting by Polly's side, and Polly had forgotten all about hunting for something to be happy about.

"You're pretty small to be traveling alone, aren't you, dear?" asked Noreen. "Are you going to Wayburne? So am I! I ought to have gone back last week, but our cook went away and I had to stay and help Mother with Jimmy and the baby. I almost packed the baby to-day, by mistake."

"Packed the baby?" wondered Polly.

"Yes!" The merry dimples danced out in Noreen's cheeks. "My things

were all over the bed, you see, and Mother put the baby down and somebody dropped a dress on top of him, and I just picked up the whole bunch and dropped it into the trunk without looking. I'm always doing things like that, — isn't it dreadful?" sighed Noreen, her black eyes sparkling joyously.

Polly's eyes were round with wonder. "Wayburne! Wayburne!" shouted the conductor.

"Is any one coming to meet you?" cried Noreen, catching up her bag. "Miss Dora's going to meet me."

"Miss Dora's coming to meet *me!*" cried Polly.

Noreen gave a little scream. "*You!* Why, then you're going to our school!"

"Come, come, children," said the cross conductor; and they grabbed

their things and hurried through the car and almost fell into the arms of a very pretty young lady waiting there.

“Why, Noreen! Careful, dear!” she cried, laughing. “And is this Polly Blair? I’m glad to see you, Polly. How nice that you have made friends with Noreen already! Noreen will have to be your little school-mamma, I think. Come now,—the stage is waiting.” And away they all went around the corner of the station and were bundled into the stage that stood there dripping in the rain, with one old gentleman stowed away in the far corner.

“To the Maples,” said Miss Dora to the driver, and the stage went rocking and jolting over the muddy road, while Noreen poured out eager questions.

“Are all the girls back, Miss Dora? Who’s going to be in my room with me? Bunty Brown? Oh, that’s good! Do you suppose she’ll make me keep my things in order? Are we going to have music with Monsieur Bland this year? Does Madame let Taddles come in the dining-room? Is Eliza there? And Annie?”

Miss Dora answered all the questions, laughing, while the old gentleman in the corner chuckled to himself. “What about the young lady with the baby?” he asked suddenly. “She seems to take everything for granted.”

“She’s a new scholar,” explained Miss Dora. “Come, children, here we are! Polly, look out and see how you like the Maples!”

They were turning through big iron

gates into a curved driveway, and presently they drew up before a long, low brown house, with a wide porch and many windows that twinkled already with lights. The driver jumped them out on the steps, and the stage and the old gentleman went jolting away, while Miss Dora rang the bell, and Polly waited beside her with a heart that beat as fast as the raindrops on the roof.

CHAPTER IV

THE hall inside was very still.

"Hullo, Annie!" cried Noreen to the maid who had opened the door. Then she clapped her hand over her mouth. "It's study-hour, isn't it, Miss Dora?" she whispered.

"Yes," said Miss Dora, softly, "but you may be excused to-night. Go up and see Lucy Dean — she's in her room with a headache — while I take Polly to Madame. Oh, here's Taddles come to welcome you, Polly!"

A great tortoise-shell cat came purring and rubbing against Polly's legs, while Miss Dora took her hand and led her through a large living-room

into the library. This was a big room, too, and full of books and pictures, with a fire burning on the hearth and a lamp on the table, and by the table sat a lady reading, who, Polly knew in a minute, must be Madame Larue.

Miss Dora was pretty, but Madame was beautiful. She did not look very young, to be sure, to Polly; but she had lovely brown eyes, and brown hair with little threads of white in it, and she wore a soft black dress with soft white lace at the neck and sleeves. Polly thought that if she had had a crown on, she would have looked just like a queen.

“This is Polly Blair, Mother,” said Miss Dora, and Madame took both Polly’s hands and drew her to her knee. “You look like your mother,

little Polly," she said. "And your mother was one of my very dearest girls. I hope you will be very happy here."

"Noreen is going to be my school-mamma," said Polly, because it was the first thing that came into her head.

Miss Dora nodded, smiling. "It will be a good thing for Noreen to have some one to look after," she said. "I approve of it!"

"So do I," said Madame. "How would you like to have your little bed next to Noreen's, Polly?" she asked.

"Oh, I'd love it!" cried Polly.

"Then you shall!" said Madame. She rang a bell, and when the maid came in, said, "Have Miss Polly's bed moved into Miss Noreen's room, Annie, and you may bring the doll's crib down from the garret, please. You'd like to

have your baby sleep by you, wouldn't you?" she added, smiling at Polly.

Polly's heart was full. She followed Miss Dora presently up the wide stairs and into a pleasant room with two little white beds against the wall, two dressing-tables and washstands, and two pretty wicker chairs.

"You can hang your things right up here," said Miss Dora, throwing open the closet door, "and then wash your hands and smooth your hair for supper, and we'll come and get you."

Polly did her best. She wished that Maggie had showed her how to tie her own hair-ribbon, but she stood on a chair before the glass and struggled with it till Noreen came in.

"I'll tie that for you, dearie!" cried Noreen, throwing her things down on

the bed. "Oh, but why are you here, Polly?"

"I'm to sleep here!" said Polly, with flushed cheeks. "You're to be my school-mamma, Noreen!"

"Oh, *love-ly*!" cried Noreen. She caught Polly's hands and twirled round and round with her till they both fell laughing on the bed. A bell rang somewhere downstairs. "Study-hour's over!" cried Noreen, springing up. She hastily tied Polly's hair and smoothed her own, and just as they finished, a door burst open at the end of the hall and a whole flock of girls came pouring out. One of them flew into Noreen's room,—a plump, round-faced little girl, with blue eyes and flaxen braids.

"O Bunty!" cried Noreen, hugging

her. "I'm so glad you're to be with me! This is Polly Blair, — she's coming into our room, too, and I'm to take care of her. Hullo, Gwen! Hullo, Alice! Did the supper-bell ring? Polly, come! we're going down!"

In a minute Polly found herself in the midst of the flock of girls, all chattering and laughing and moving along the hall and down the stairs. At the foot Miss Dora stood waiting. "Polly is to sit by me to-night!" she cried; and Polly went in, very shy and proud, with the pretty teacher.

At the head of the long table stood Madame, and Miss Dora took her place at the foot, while another teacher, whom they called Miss Minns, was in the middle. When the teachers sat down, down sat all the girls at once,

the soup was brought in, and then what a chattering there was!

Polly, used to the little round table set for three, could hardly eat anything with so much going on around her. Merry Miss Dora kept slipping things on her plate, and Noreen nodded to her across the table, and Madame smiled and chatted with them all in such a gracious way that Polly thought her more like a queen than ever.

“O yes, she’s very lovely when you’re good,” Noreen said, going through the hall after supper with her arm around Polly. “If you’ve done anything wrong — M-m-m!” And Noreen shook her head as if no words could express the dreadfulness of Madame if you were bad!

“Couldn’t we play Robbers’ Caves?”

she asked Miss Dora, when they were all gathered in the living-room. "It's Polly's first night, and we ought to do something nice to amuse her!"

Miss Dora smiled at Noreen's eager face. Robbers' Caves was usually played only on Friday nights, when there was no study-hour. "You may ask Madame," she said.

Noreen went and tapped at the library door, which stood open, and went in. "Please, Madame," she said, in her prettiest way, "may we play Robbers' Caves to-night, on account of Polly?"

Madame smiled, too, at her grave air and dancing dimples. "Yes, you may," she said. "And you may go up with Polly to-night — she is to go to bed at eight o'clock — and see that she

is all right. You are to be her school-mamma, you know."

"Yes, Madame. Thank you, Madame," said Noreen very politely. "We may!" she cried, dancing back to the girls. "Who's to be first Chief, Miss Dora?"

"Bunty," said Miss Dora, "shall be the Robber Chief, and Gwen, the Baron. Choose sides!"

The Baron and his band stayed in the Castle while the robbers scattered, at the whistle of their Chief, to hide. If they were not all found and caught and put in the Dungeon at the end of the hall when the whistle blew again, they had a chance to make their way back in safety to the Castle. "I'll keep Polly with me!" cried Noreen, catching Polly's hand.

The girls were allowed to go anywhere on the first floor for this game, and they found splendid caves under the desks and behind the platform in the long, dark schoolroom, or under the stairs or the long table in the dining-room. Noreen and Polly raced down the hall and peeped into the schoolroom. It was full of an excited whispering and rustling. "Not there," said Noreen. "Wait! I know a place!"

She dashed through the dining-room and out into a little passage beyond, from which the back stairs led up, pushed Polly into a little closet under the stairs, and shut the door after them. "They'll never find us here!" she exulted.

They crouched down, giggling and breathing hard, in an atmosphere of

brooms and dusters. Outside they could hear the Baron and his band running about, searching, and now and then a little scream as a robber was found, and presently steps and voices came close to them.

“Oh, look in the housemaid’s closet!” exclaimed Gwen’s voice.

“No, no!” said Miss Dora’s. “You’re not allowed there, you know!”

Noreen held her breath; but the dust had flown up Polly’s little nose, and alas, just at the wrong minute, she sneezed!

There was an exclamation from without, and the door was flung open. “Why, Noreen!” said Miss Dora, “Don’t you know you were told not to go in that closet?”

Noreen’s sparkling face was all peni-

tence and sorrow. "I'm so sorry!" she said. "I forgot — indeed I did!"

"When will you learn to remember!" sighed Miss Dora. "Polly, will you help your little school-mamma to remember? Hark, there's the whistle! Run, you'll be late!"

Noreen threw her arms impulsively round the teacher, and then away they flew to the Castle; but they were the last ones in, and Noreen had to take her turn at being the Baron.

When the exciting game was over, Polly had been caught twice, and had caught three robbers with her own hands, to her very great delight. Miss Dora laughed as she looked at the rosy face.

"Pretty good for the first night,

little Polly!" she said. "Now for our 'Maples' song!"

She sat down to the piano and played a merry marching tune, and the girls gathered about her and sang.

"When first the buds begin to swell, there's
scarlet on the boughs;

Green banners float upon the air when summer
breezes drowse;

And when the winds of autumn call, they
answer, fold on fold,

From the valley to the hilltop, with their
splendid red and gold!

The Maples! The Maples!

We sing them high and low!

The bravest and the loveliest of all the trees
that grow!

In all the summer suns that shine and all the
storms that freeze,

We sing our own dear 'Maples' beneath our
maple trees!"

The music went with such a swing

that Polly could hardly keep her feet still. When it stopped and she looked up, she found Madame standing smiling beside her.

"This little girl is younger than any of you," said Madame to the girls. "Noreen is going to be her school-mamma, but I hope you will all be good to her, and remember that she will look to you for an example, will you?"

"We will, Madame!" they all cried heartily. Then they said their good-nights and trooped away to study-hour, while Noreen and Polly went upstairs.

In the pretty bedroom was a third little white bed next to Noreen's, and beside it the dearest little doll's crib with white curtains tied back with pink ribbons. Polly's trunk had been

unpacked, and Noreen helped her with the hooks and buttons that she could not reach, and chattered to her while she undressed.

"I like Noreen," Polly whispered to Rose-Marie when she tucked her into her crib, "and I like Miss Dora and the girls, and I think — I think I'm going to love Madame Larue!"

She turned the ring on her finger when she was safe in bed and said

"Twinkle, twinkle, little ring,
How I wonder — what — you'll — bring —"

And though she had not expected to sleep a single wink all night, the next thing she knew it was morning, a great bell was ringing in the hall, and Noreen was calling her to get up.

CHAPTER V

"Just look at that sunshine!" cried Noreen, buttoning Polly's dress up for her all wrong. "It's a perfectly lovely day, and I do believe Miss Dora will let us go chestnutting this afternoon, if we know all our lessons. I'm going to get Lucy Dean to ask her!"

Away she flew, leaving Polly, a very one-sided and funny-looking little damsel, to struggle with her difficulties alone.

Polly had been at the Maples two weeks, and she had already learned to do a good many things for herself that

she had never done before; for Noreen, though she loved her dearly, was quite as likely as not to forget all about her little charge if something else caught her butterfly attention.

Only two days after Polly's arrival, Noreen had left her sitting on the big rock by the south drive where they had gone after school with their sewing. "Stay right there, Polly, till I come back,—I've forgotten my thimble," she said, and she ran back to the house, fell in with a party of girls just starting for the village to buy crackers and postage stamps under Miss Minns' protecting wing, and went merrily off with them down the north drive without a thought of poor Polly, perched waiting on her rock. Late in the afternoon Miss Dora, hurrying home

from town, heard a little voice calling as she passed the spot, and found Polly, like Casabianca, cold and tired, but sticking faithfully to her post.

"We shall have to give you another school-mamma," said Miss Dora, vexed and laughing, as she took the child into the warm house. "Noreen will lose you yet!"

"I'd rather have Noreen, if she does lose me," said Polly. And Noreen hugged her, full of remorse and affection; but she went right on forgetting just the same.

On this particular morning kind-hearted Bunty came to the rescue, and straightened Polly out, and tied and buttoned her all shipshape into her little pink dress, and the two ran down to breakfast just in time.

It certainly was the most beautiful of October days, and just right for a nutting party. Noreen kept nudging Lucy Dean, who sat next to her, to ask Miss Dora.

“Wait till after lessons,” murmured Lucy. She was a pretty, delicate, fair-haired girl, one of the best scholars in school, and she always knew the best time for everything; so Noreen had to be patient.

After breakfast the beds had to be made and the rooms put in order, and there was a great tossing about of pillows and chattering and laughing in the rooms where the sunshine poured through the open windows. Polly could make Rose-Marie’s bed now, and her own, too, with a little help.

“Very good!” said Miss Dora, put-

ting her bright face in at the door when the others had gone down. "Ready for lessons, Polly?"

Polly gathered up her books and ran down. She saw the big girls all sitting at their desks in the long school-room as she passed, with Miss Minns very straight and prim on the platform. Madame was away for a few days. Polly, being so much younger than the rest, had her lessons by herself, and she said most of them in the sunny dining-room, at the end where a glass door led into the conservatory, full of green, growing things. This was delightful. Polly loved to recite to Miss Dora, and she loved her lessons — most of them. When Taddles came and jumped purring into her lap, and Miss Dora let him stay, she recited better than ever.

“Good!” cried Miss Dora, clapping her book shut, while Polly blushed for pleasure. “Go to the head, Miss Polly Blair!”

And then came Miss Minns and the arithmetic lesson.

“Put down that cat,” said Miss Minns, the minute she came in. Polly put Taddles down regretfully. Miss Minns was not pretty and merry like Miss Dora. She was a very bony young woman, with a sharp nose and a funny little tight mouth that always made Polly think of a sewed-up buttonhole. She asked confusing questions, and followed them up with such sharp looks that somehow the answers flew right out of Polly’s head when she most wanted to remember them.

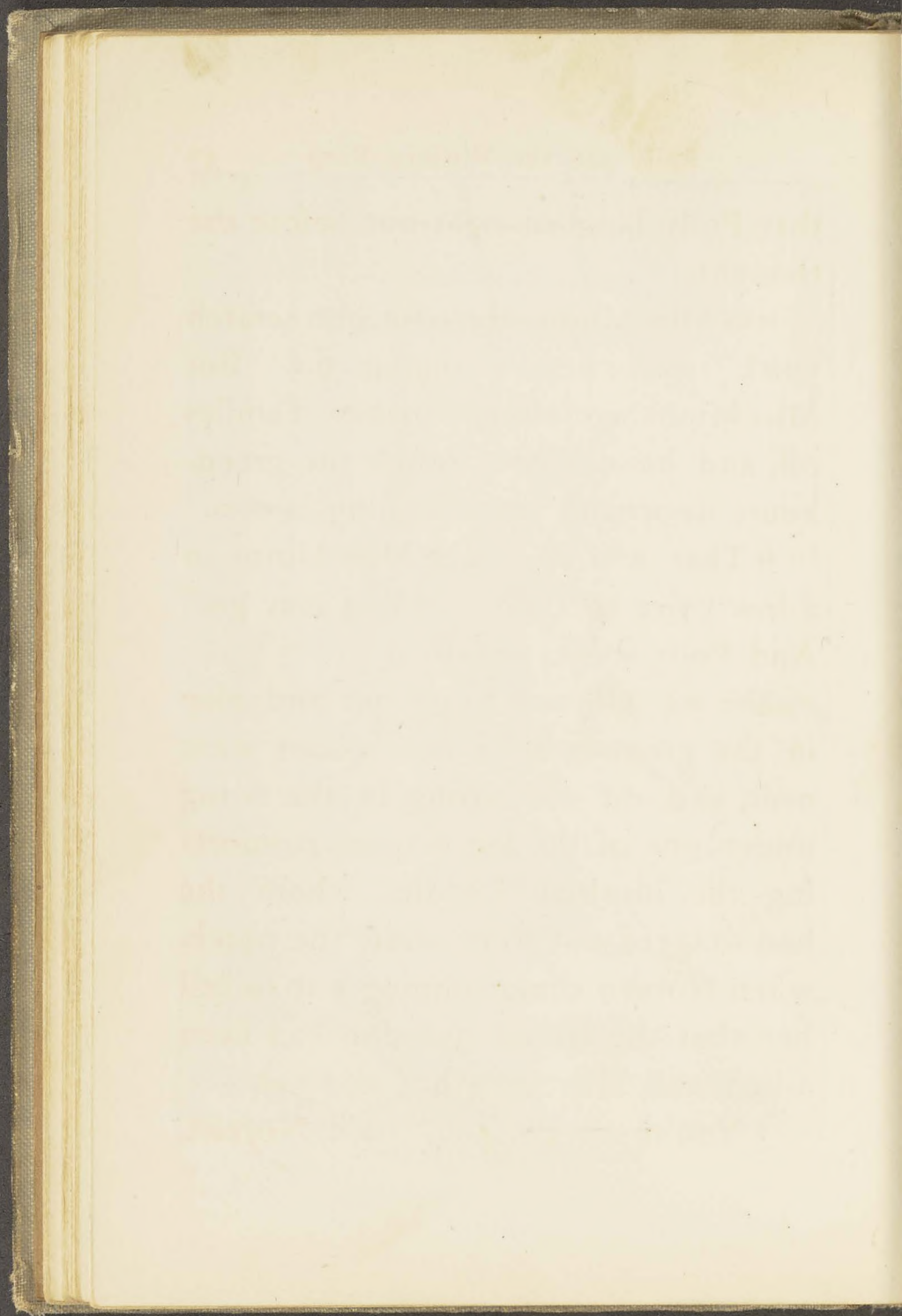
To-day it was worse than usual.

Polly blundered, and Miss Minns snapped, and of course Polly could not tell her that the more she snapped the harder it was to keep those slippery numbers straight. She was saying six times, and saying it very badly indeed, when Taddles came creeping in again.

“Put that cat out and shut the door,” commanded Miss Minns, and Polly obeyed; that is, she intended to shut the door, but it was not quite latched, and before anybody knew it Taddles was back again, and this time he made straight for Miss Minns and jumped into the back of her chair! She gave a little scream and sprang up, and Taddles, whose claws had caught in her dress, clung to her like a burr. It was so funny to see the little slim teacher with the great cat on her back



Taddles clung to her like a burr.



that Polly laughed right out before she thought.

“O Miss Minns, don’t let him scratch you!” she cried, springing up. But Miss Minns had already shaken Taddles off, and he dashed through the greenhouse door with his tail as big as two.

“That will do,” said Miss Minns in a low voice to Polly. “You may go.” And Polly went, joyfully.

She was allowed to go out and play in the grounds after her lessons were over, and she was sitting in the swing under one of the big maples, comforting the insulted Taddles, whom she had dragged out from under the porch, when Noreen came running out to tell her that the fateful question had been asked, and Miss Dora had said yes.

“You’re to go, too,” said Noreen,

squeezing Polly's arm as they walked back to the house. "She said I might come and tell you. How did you get on with Minnsey to-day, dear? I'm sorry I buttoned you up wrong this morning, Polly!"

"I love you," said Polly.

"You're a darling!" returned No-reen.

She helped Polly very thoughtfully when they dressed for the trip after lunch, and then ran down to join the girls who were waiting in the drive, swinging pails and baskets, and chattering like a flock of sparrows. But when Polly ran down after her, there stood Miss Minns, severe and dreadful, confronting Miss Dora in the hall.

"That child is not going out this afternoon," Miss Minns was saying.

“What!” cried Miss Dora.

“She is going to stay at home and study her arithmetic,” said Miss Minns. “She doesn’t learn her lessons properly, and besides that, she was impertinent to me this morning.”

“O Miss Minns!” cried Miss Dora. “I don’t think Polly can have meant to be impertinent!”

“She was, — very impertinent,” declared Miss Minns, “and she ought to be punished, and must be.”

This was terrible. Nothing like it had ever happened to Polly before. She turned pink and she turned white. She tried to speak and couldn’t. Poor Miss Dora was almost as much distressed. “I can’t wait to talk it over now,” she said. “If this is so, Polly, you must stay at home and study, dear.

Be good, and we'll soon be back,
and — ”

Polly could not wait to hear the rest. She flashed past Miss Minns and up to her own room like a little streak of pink lightning.

“O Rose-Marie!” she cried passionately, catching the doll up in her arms, “it’s come! The time of greatest need has come! Miss Minns hates me, and I couldn’t ever please her, if I tried till I was a hundred! There couldn’t ever be anything worse than this, and I’m going to send for the knight to come and take me away! Right now, Rose-Marie, I’m going to!”

Rose-Marie did not say anything, but she looked at Polly very earnestly out of her wide blue eyes; and Polly

put her down and went over to the window. The girls were just going down the drive, chattering and laughing. Polly looked at them with a hard little spot of sorrow and anger in her heart. She thought of the ring, of course, and she even sat down and looked at it for a minute; but somehow she couldn't think of Mother or of any one she loved just then. She could think only of Miss Minns and her hateful little sewed-up mouth, and of the girls, running and playing among the bright leaves in the rustling autumn woods.

"Are you studying?" asked Miss Minns severely, appearing at the door.

That settled it. The moment she was gone, Polly flew to her desk and wrote a fiery little note to Uncle Bob.

She told him that she had found out what was the time of greatest need, and it was when you were blamed and punished when you didn't deserve it, and she couldn't bear Miss Minns and the arithmetic another minute, and the knight must come and rescue her before she pined away and died of trouble. Polly spelt it "trubble." Miss Dora usually helped her with her letters, but she couldn't wait for Miss Dora now, and besides there was no telling what Miss Dora might say to this kind of letter. So as soon as it was finished, Polly took it downstairs, intending to post it herself at the box across the road from the iron gates.

And then all of a sudden she sat down on the lowest step with the letter in her hand. Maybe it was the

look that she had caught in Rose-Marie's eyes as she went out of the room, or maybe it was the sunbeam from the hall window that caught the blue stone on her finger and set it twinkling. Anyway, she knew suddenly that she had not given the ring a fair chance. The hard spot in her heart had melted a little while she was writing her letter. She found that she could think of Mother quite easily now. She shut her eyes and thought so hard that the tears came, and then the hard spot melted a little more.

“Wishing-ring,
Sunshine bring!”

said Polly, with a sob in her voice.

A door opened upstairs. “Polly,” said Miss Minns, “when you have

learned your table, you may come and say it to me."

"Yes'm," said Polly, meekly. "I w-will."

"Miss Minns was near wild with the toothache all night," said Annie, when she came up a little later with clean towels for the rooms, and found Polly doubled up in a dismal little bowknot by the window, studying. "I expect that's what's the matter. She hasn't had a bite to eat, neither, since last night. No wonder she's crosser'n two sticks to-day!"

The rest of the hard spot in Polly's heart melted instantly at that, like an icicle in the sun. She had had a toothache once herself, and she knew that if anything would make a person snap, it was that. And nothing to eat

for almost a whole day! Poor Miss Minns!

Polly said her table so perfectly, soon after that, that Miss Minns smiled and said she might go out and take a walk in the grounds. It was funny how much better the buttonhole mouth looked when it smiled!

“O Miss Minns, please, won’t you come too?” cried Polly, before she thought.

Miss Minns looked almost as much astonished as she had when Taddles jumped on her back! “Oh, I guess not!” she said, turning away sharply.

But she did. Whether it was because her toothache was so much better, or because Polly’s eyes were so blue, or the sunshine so bright, I cannot say; but so it happened that when

Polly went out of the door, Miss Minns went, too. Polly took Rose-Marie and the ridiculous Baa-lamb that Uncle Bob had said would melt the heart of the terrible teacher, and Miss Minns actually carried one while Polly carried the other.

They walked slowly down through the sunny grape-arbor at the back of the house and past the yellowing stalks in the garden and back through the orchard. And Polly must have made it very clear to Miss Minns how sorry she was that she laughed when Taddles jumped on her, and how much better she meant to study her lessons in future; for when the nutting-party returned, flocking merrily up the drive with full pails, a good deal earlier than they were expected, they came upon

the surprising sight of Polly and Miss Minns eating cake together in the summer-house!

"Polly had such an early lunch," explained Miss Minns!

"Of course," agreed Miss Dora, delighted to find that there wasn't any trouble to be settled. "We're starved ourselves, for the girls were so busy gathering nuts they couldn't stop to eat. Lucy's cold, too. Come, let's all race up to the house and have our sandwiches by the fire. One, two, —" And away they all went, Miss Minns running with the rest, and the first to reach the house!

They had the merriest picnic meal around the fire, with tiny cups of hot cocoa that Annie brought in, and Miss Dora said that if they didn't do their

lessons and eat their suppers properly after this dissipation, she should put them all on bread and water for a week to make up. And after supper they roasted chestnuts in the ashes, and ate *those*, and Polly had her full share and was none the worse for it.

As for the letter to Uncle Bob, she tore that up in very small pieces and buried them the next day at recess in a hole behind the summer-house, and nobody ever knew anything about it except Rose-Marie, who kept her pretty mouth shut and never told.

CHAPTER VI

THE next thing that happened was more serious. Day after day Polly tore the leaves from her calendar, and the days flew as fast as Uncle Bob had said they would. The ring did its work faithfully, and every day when Polly said,

“Twinkle, twinkle, little ring,
How I wonder what you’ll bring!”

it twinkled back at her with its bright eye, and something pleasant was sure to be about, when she looked for it.

To be sure, she had to look pretty hard sometimes. Miss Minns still snapped and the arithmetic numbers

were still slippery. Noreen forgot her and Gwen teased her, and on stormy days sometimes, or at night, it did seem as if she must see Mother or Father just for a minute. But somehow the ring pulled her through all these troubles, helping her to remember that the worst kind of an arithmetic lesson can't last forever, and that Father was getting strong and well on that far-away mountain-top, and that Mother was loving her and counting on her every hour. And there were lovely letters from everybody, and twice came a box full of exciting presents; and there were candy-pulls and popcorn parties on Saturday afternoons, and all sorts of little surprises on school-days. And so the autumn flew by, and the first snow came.

"Now for fun!" cried Noreen, standing at the window and watching the white flakes fall. That very day a sled came by express for Polly, and a box with a fur cap and coat that made her look like a jolly little Esquimau when she went out coasting with the others.

It was this fur coat that nearly made an end of her that winter night when the serious thing happened.

"Squeeze yourself as small as you can," whispered Noreen, "and we'll all push."

Polly was standing in the dim pantry, with Noreen and Bunty and Gwen Davis and two or three others — not Lucy Dean, O no! For these naughty girls were going out coasting alone, at night, without permission. Madame had promised them a moon-

light coasting party when the moon was full, but they could not wait for that.

They had crept from their beds when the house was all still, dressed hurriedly, and stolen downstairs in their stocking-feet, to put on boots and rubbers in the kitchen.

"We could never go out of the front door," said Gwen. "Somebody would be sure to hear us. But Polly is so small, she can climb through the pantry window and open the kitchen door for us, and we can go out the back way."

The kitchen was always locked up at night, being in a wing, with only the servants' rooms above. Polly was lifted up to the window by the girls, and holding her breath, and vigorously

pushed from behind, she wriggled through and dropped safe on the other side. There she unlocked the door and put on her coat and shoes, and in five minutes they were all out and stumbling across the snow with their sleds to the pasture lot back of the house.

“O-oo! it’s dark!” breathed Bunty.

“And cold!” shuddered Alice.

“It’s glorious!” cried Gwen, jumping on her sled.

Dim and ghostly showed the long, glistening hill, sloping down to a little frozen pond at its foot. Black shapes of trees stuck up here and there through the snow. Polly wished she were safe at home in her little bed; but down she went with the rest. Down, down, and out across the pond clear to the

back fence, and up, up again, toiling and panting.

"It's as safe as anything!" cried Noreen, glowing with excitement. "Come, Polly, get on in front. I'll take you down this time!"

Polly got on, and down they went; but Noreen, careless as usual, struck her foot too deep into the snow at the foot of the hill, the sled slewed around, and over they went, headfirst.

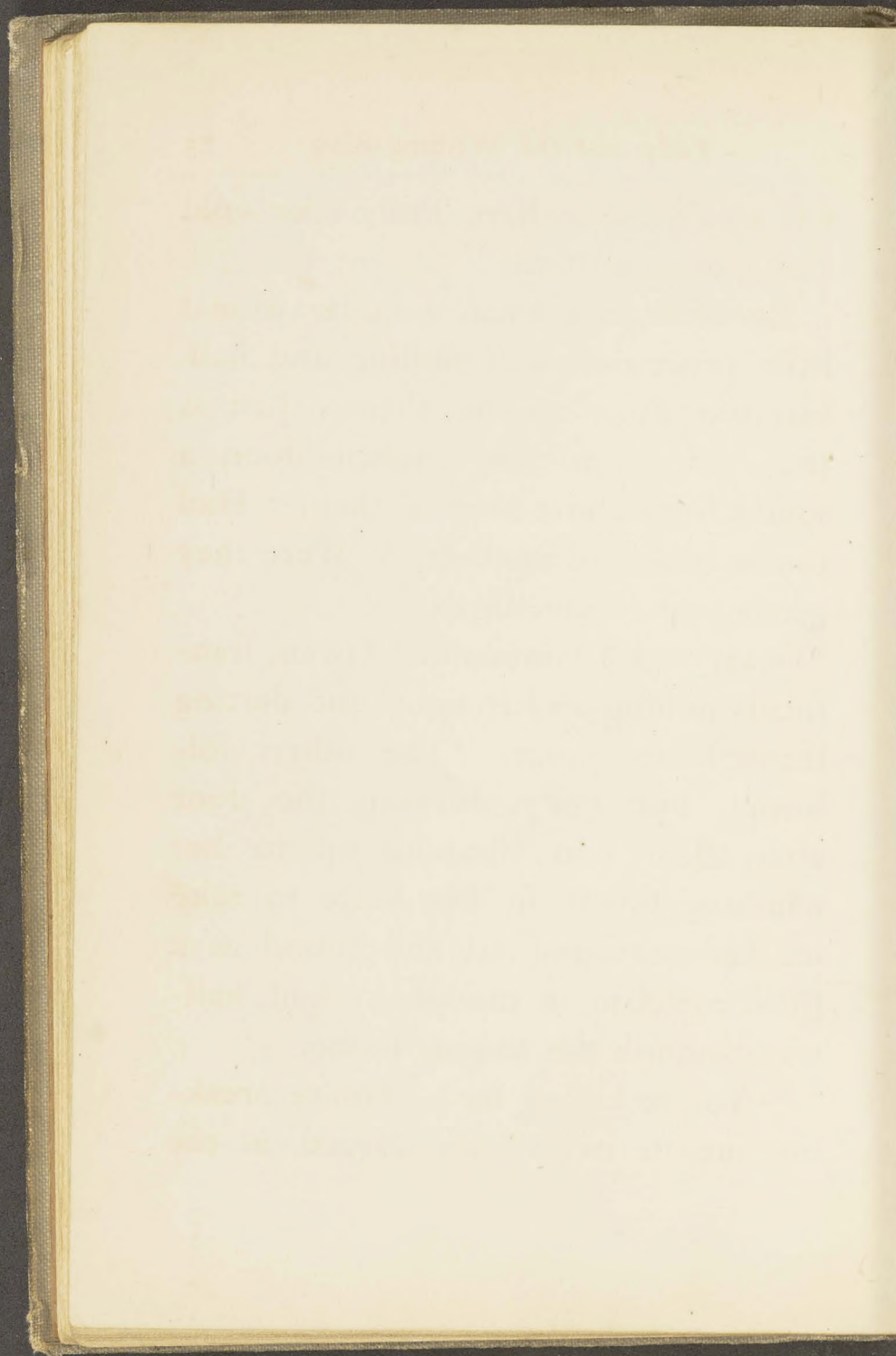
"Are you all right, dear?" cried Noreen, scrambling to her feet.

"All right," answered Polly valiantly, getting to hers. But the ice was thin just there at the edge of the pond, and had broken under her weight, so that her clothes were wet through.

"We'd better go back," said Gwen, rather snappishly, hurrying to the spot.



The sled slewed around, and over they went, headfirst.



"It won't do to have Polly take cold and give us all away!"

So back they went, a rather dismal little procession, half pulling and half carrying Polly among them. Just as they got inside the kitchen door, a sound from above startled them. Had the maids heard anything? Were they getting up to investigate?

"Hurry!" commanded Gwen, frantically pulling off her boots and darting through the door. The others followed, but Polly, locking the door after them, and climbing up to her window, forgot in her haste to take off her coat, and fat and round as a little barrel in it, she stuck tight half-way through the narrow frame.

"You're killing me! You're breaking me in two!" she gasped, as the

girls pulled at her wildly. Her little heels were kicking in the kitchen, her arms waving in the pantry; and again came the noise from above.

“We’ve got to get her through!” breathed Gwen; and with one desperate jerk through she came. “Fly!” said Gwen, and Polly picked herself up from the floor where she had fallen and flew, like a scared rabbit, through the hall and up the stairs, not daring to look behind her. Noreen and Bunty bounced into the room after her like noiseless rubber balls, and they all undressed with beating hearts and shaking fingers and crept into bed.

Polly was glad to cuddle into the warm clothes. Certainly, coasting by night was not half as much fun as Noreen had promised it would be!

The next morning she was found to have a little cold. Her eyes were heavy and her head ached, and Madame excused her from her lessons and tucked her up cosily on the big sofa in the library near the fire. Here Polly stayed all day, and she ought to have had a most delightful time, for Miss Dora petted her, she had Taddles for company, and the girls to come in and talk to her, and Madame herself to take care of her in a quiet, tender sort of way that made Polly choke up and think of Mother. But she did not have a delightful time at all.

“This the magic ring will do,
Make you happy, keep you true.”

That was what the ring said to her every time she looked at its twinkling

stone. The ring could not make her happy now, and something kept her from even trying to use the charm, so that she turned the stone into her palm, where she could not see it. When Annie brought for her luncheon some delicious milk-toast with apple-jelly to put on it, she hardly tasted it. She put the plate down on the hearth and Taddles finished it for her to the last drop, and washed his face afterward and went to sleep on the rug, a purring and contented ball of fur. Polly envied Taddles!

In the afternoon it was much worse, for Madame came in, looking grave and sorrowful, and said that some of the girls had gone out coasting the night before without permission. Eliza had heard a noise in the night, and

had found telltale footprints on the kitchen floor in the morning. The girls had all confessed, when questioned, and were forgiven, but Madame said that they could not now have the promised moonlight party.

“I thought I could trust them,” she said, stroking Polly’s hand as she sat close beside her. “Even Noreen, careless as she is, is hardly ever disobedient. It makes me very sad that it should have happened, but I am glad they have all owned up, and said they were sorry.”

Polly’s heart felt like a big hot lump in her breast. The girls had not told that it was she who had climbed through the pantry window and let them out. Madame did not know that she had been disobedient too.

She need never know. How fortunate that was! Madame's hands were so soft and her eyes so kind; but how stern and terrible she might be if one told her a thing like that! Polly remembered with a shudder how Noreen had looked that first night when she said, "O yes, she's lovely when you're good, but if you're bad — m-m!"

All that long afternoon Polly lay on the sofa, getting more miserable every minute. The time of greatest need had come at last — she was perfectly sure of that now, for nobody could possibly feel worse than she did — and she meant to send her summons to the knight the first thing in the morning, if she was not dead by then. Father or Mother or Uncle Bob would know how to do something, quick, to make

her feel better and take away that dreadful hot lump in her breast! So she lay and planned about it.

But when twilight fell and the room was full of soft shadows and firelight, and she heard the girls singing merrily on their way to study-hour, the happy girls who were good and the girls who had confessed and been forgiven, it was too much for Polly.

“Make you happy, keep you true,
Love has wished it on for you!”

said the ring, sparkling as she opened her hand. And at that she simply couldn't stand it another minute. Madame had come in and was sitting over by the window, looking out into the dusk. “I think we shall have some more snow,” she began to say

cheerily, when a little figure tumbled all of a sudden off the sofa in a tangle of rugs and pillows, and came and cast itself on her lap with a burst of tears and a wail of confession.

“I did it, too, Madame!” sobbed Polly. “I sq-queezed through the pantry window and opened the door and went c-coasting and fell in the pond and — and everything!”

If Madame was terrible, it was only because she was so gentle. She gathered Polly up in her arms and let her cry till she was quiet, and then she and Polly talked it all over together in the firelight, with Taddles listening on the rug; and Polly had never tasted anything so delicious as that very identical kind of milk-toast with apple-jelly to put on it, which Annie brought in

afterward for her supper, and of which Taddles did not get one drop.

“I knew you would tell me,” Madame said at the end of the talk, with a little smile that made Polly’s eyes water again. “But you didn’t need to.” And she opened the black and silver bag at her belt and took out a little white mitten.

“You dropped it when you climbed through the window,” she said, “and Eliza picked it up. But I wanted you to tell me yourself, Polly,—and you did!”

So once more the summons did not go to the knight of the ring, for the time of greatest need was not yet.

CHAPTER VII

IT had been decided that Polly should stay at school through the Christmas holidays, as Aunt Sue was too busy to take care of her; and great was her joy when she found that Noreen was to stay, too. Both girls had wonderful Christmas boxes sent to them, and they managed to have a very good time, but they were glad enough to see their schoolmates back, and to have school begin again after New Year's.

Spring came with a rush and a roar that year. There was a great deal of snow on the ground, and when the snow

melted and the big rains came in February, the little streams were filled so full that their banks would hardly hold them. The brook at the foot of the garden at the Maples had its full share. A wire fence ran along its edge, under the steep bank, with a gate that opened on a little rustic bridge; and here the girls loved to stand and watch the little stream shaking itself free from the ice and boiling and bubbling down over its stones.

One stormy night in March it rose so high and boiled and bubbled so hard that it carried away part of the little bridge. Then Madame shut the gate and forbade the girls to open it until the bridge was mended. "Everybody remember to be careful," she told them that morning in the schoolroom.

She said "everybody," but she looked at Noreen. "As if I would think of touching their old gate!" cried Noreen afterward, with her head very high.

And only two days after that, when she was playing ball at the top of the glen and her ball bounced down over the edge, down went Noreen after it like a squirrel; and seeing it lying just the other side of the fence, she had the gate open in a twinkling, and picked it up before she remembered!

"Well, there's no harm done," she thought, as she scrambled up the slippery bank. Nobody had seen her unless it was Thomas, who was mending the roof of the barn not far away, or Binks, his dog, who was capering and barking at him below; and that might

have been the end of the matter if a few minutes later the other girls had not come flying out to the garden to play.

“Madame said it was too windy for a regular walk, and we might exercise in the grounds!” cried Gwen. “Tag me to the sun-dial, Polly!”

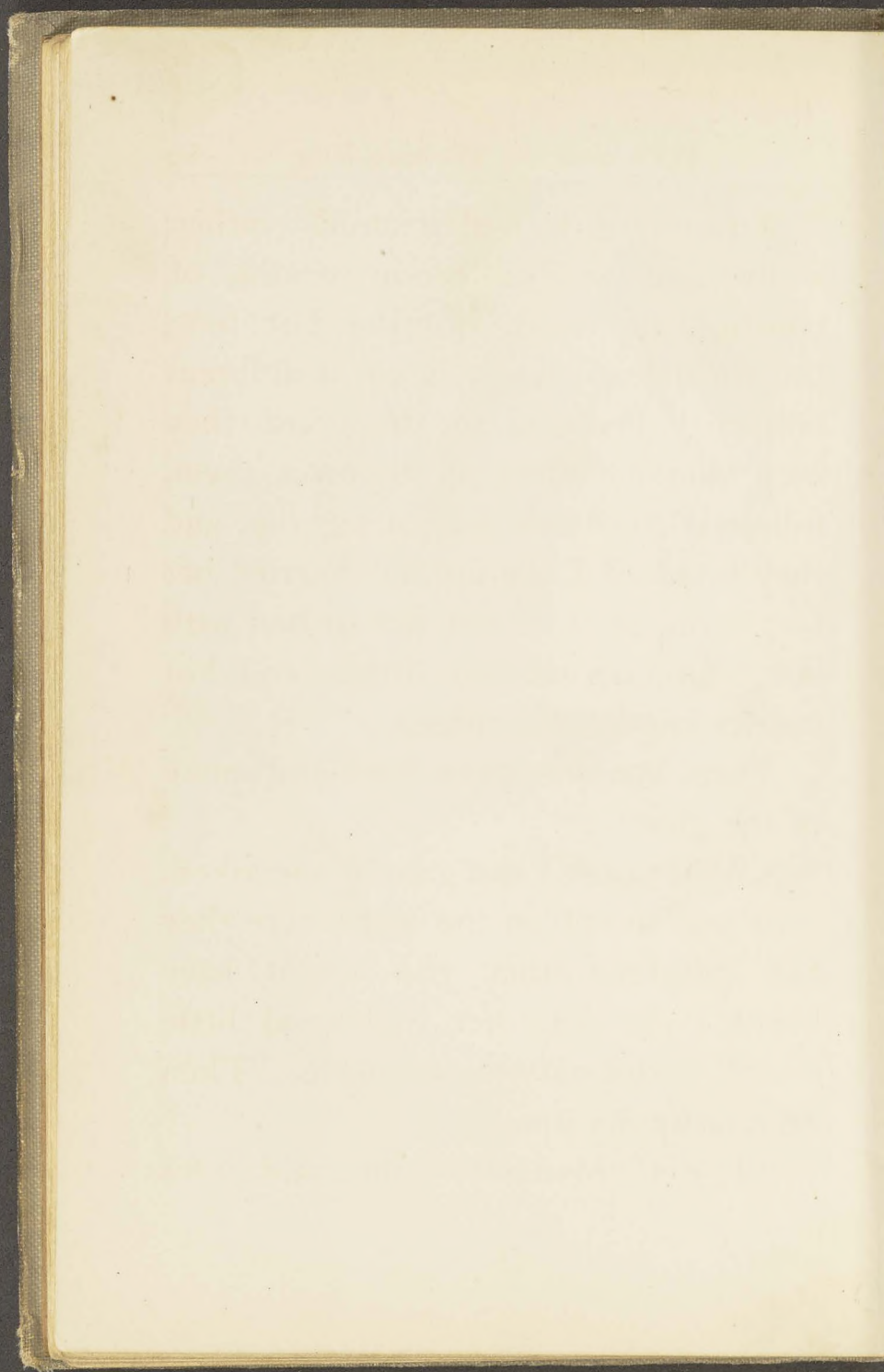
Away they went, Polly’s little legs twinkling over the ground almost as fast as Gwen’s longer ones. Their skirts fluttered and their hair streamed in the wind as they romped and played. “The bridge isn’t mended yet, is it?” cried Bunt, stopping suddenly to look down. She stopped too suddenly, for Lucy Dean, who was flying close behind, ran into her before she could stop herself. Lucy’s foot slipped, she tripped and stumbled, and the next instant she was rolling down the bank.

"It's all right, the gate's shut!" laughed Bunty. "O no, no, it isn't!" she cried, her voice changing. The others rushed up to look, and lo, the gate was wide open! Before they could get down to her, Lucy had slid through and clear to the edge of the stream, and splash! over she went head foremost into the icy water!

The girls screamed, and Thomas came running. Some of them dashed back toward the house and some started down the bank. Fortunately the water was not very deep just there, so that presently Lucy found her feet and began to wade toward the shore. The waves pulled at her, but Thomas caught her and lifted her out in his strong arms, and carried her, shivering and gasping and crying, up the bank.



Lucy began to wade toward the shore.



To some girls, and in mild weather, a ducking in the brook would, of course, have been nothing but fun; but for delicate Lucy it was a different matter. Halfway to the house they met Madame hurrying to meet them, followed by Annie with a big rug, and they bundled Lucy up and hurried her to the house and put her to bed with hot blankets and hot drinks and hot bottles enough for three.

Then Madame came back and spoke to the girls.

“Who opened the gate?” she asked.

It was so still in the hall where they had gathered that you might have heard Polly draw her frightened little breath. But only for a minute. Then Noreen spoke up.

“I did, Madame,” she said. “I

wanted to get my ball, and I never thought about the gate. But I shut it again. I know I did, because — ”

Madame did not wait to hear any more. “O Noreen!” she said. That was all. But her face was very sad, oh, very, very sad and stern; and Noreen burst into tears and rushed away to her own room.

“I did shut the gate!” she sobbed out to Polly, who came running after her. “I did! I did!”

“I did shut the gate!” she cried to Miss Dora, who came in later to talk to her. “I know I did, because I remember hearing the latch snap and knowing it was all safe!”

“But the gate was open, and you were the last person that went near it,” said Miss Dora, sadly. “And when

you are always so careless, Noreen, how can we think you were not careless this time? ”

So that was the beginning of the worst time that Polly had ever known. The fright and the wetting in the icy water were too much for poor Lucy Dean, and by the next morning she was very sick. Her parents were away, traveling, and could not be sent for, but a nurse was put in charge of her at once. Miss Dora went in and out of her room with tears in her eyes, and Madame looked so sad and anxious that Polly could not bear to see her. As for Noreen, nobody could do anything with her. She just lay on her bed and cried herself sick.

“Nobody will believe me,” she sobbed, when Polly tried to comfort

her. "Lucy will die and everybody will think it is my fault, and they will send me home, and it will break my mother's heart, and I did shut the gate. I did!"

O yes, it was a very terrible time! Polly looked at her ring many times a day, and tried to make her wish, but somehow she could not seem to see even a peep of sunshine or blue sky anywhere.

It was while she was making up Rose-Marie's bed one morning almost a week after the accident, that a thought came to her suddenly. She whispered it to Rose-Marie, and Rose-Marie did not say anything, but she looked at Polly very earnestly with her wide blue eyes, and Polly put her down and slipped out of the room in

a great hurry and down the stairs. It was Saturday, and the girls were all going very quietly and gravely about their usual tasks. Even Annie's eyes were red as she softly dusted the library. No, she said, Madame was not there — she was up in Miss Lucy's room. The doctor was there, and so was Miss Dora. There was nobody to be found anywhere downstairs except Miss Minns, who came suddenly out of the greenhouse door just as Polly passed the dining room.

This was pretty bad, but Polly just had to ask somebody. "Miss Minns," she said, without stopping to get her breath, "please, — would the time of greatest need be when it was for somebody else?"

Miss Minns jumped.

"What on earth do you mean, child?" she exclaimed.

"I mean," Polly explained, "if you could ask to be helped only just once, and at exactly the right time, when there was the greatest need, wouldn't that be when it wasn't for yourself, but for somebody else that you liked very much?"

"Why, — why, yes, I suppose so," said Miss Minns in a distracted sort of way. "It is always better to ask help for others than it is for one's self." And off she went upstairs without even looking at Polly.

But Polly had had her answer. Up she flew to her own room and down she sat and wrote her letter to Uncle Bob.

"I think it is the time of greatest

need," she wrote, "because it is for Noreen. Noreen is in a very dreadful trouble" — Polly spelt it right this time — "and so is Madame and so is Lucy, and I don't know what to do. So I have wished on the ring for the knight to come, and O Uncle Bob, I do hope it is the right time, because I need you very much. Please, dear Uncle Bob, come soon.

"Your loving Polly."

The letter went out in the fat mail-bag with the other girls' letters that afternoon; and by tea-time the next night, which was just as soon as the fastest train could possibly get him there, the knight of the ring was standing under the gaslight in the hall at the Maples, and a joyful, tearful, laughing, sobbing, altogether rapturous

little Polly was clinging to his neck as if she would never let him go.

“O Uncle Bob!” she cried. “Was it the right time? Was it?”

“It was *precisely* the right time, Polly Wogg,” answered Uncle Bob. “And now I’m here, we’re going to get some of these troubles straightened out, or know the reason why!”

CHAPTER VIII

"IN the first place," said Uncle Bob, briskly, "we've got to find out who left that gate open!"

Uncle Bob and Polly were out strolling in the grounds after lessons on Monday.

"O Uncle Bob!" cried Polly, "you don't think it was Noreen?"

"Of course I don't!" returned Uncle Bob. "Doesn't she say so herself?" For Uncle Bob had been introduced to Noreen the night before, and had adopted her into his affections on the spot as Polly's school-mamma. "Now let's see," he said. "Is there anybody else about the place except you girls and the teachers and the maids?"

“There’s Thomas, out at the barn,” said Polly.

“And Mrs. Thomas, I suppose,” said Uncle Bob. “Any little Thomases?”

“No,” laughed Polly. “Only Binks Thomas, — that’s Thomas’s dog.”

“Oho!” said Uncle Bob. “Thomas’s dog! Well, suppose you and I take a little walk down to the barn and see Thomas and Thomas’s dog.”

So Polly got permission from Miss Dora, and away they went.

“Smart dog, is he, Thomas?” asked Uncle Bob, as Binks jumped and capered about them merrily at the barn door.

“Very smart dog, sir,” said Thomas, touching his hat.

“Got any tricks?” asked Uncle Bob.

“Plenty of ’em, sir,” said Thomas. “He can sit up and beg, and fetch and carry, and speak when you tell him to, — he can do anything but talk, sir, that dog!”

“Well, well!” said Uncle Bob. “Pity he can’t talk! Now might we borrow that smart dog of yours for a little while this morning, Thomas?”

“Sure, sir,” said Thomas. And on they went, all three, to the garden, and Uncle Bob helped Polly down the bank where Lucy had fallen that unlucky day.

The bridge had been mended now, and the gate stood open as before. But Uncle Bob shut it. “Pretty loose latch that is, isn’t it!” said he. “Anybody pulling a little on the long end could open it as quick as a wink.

Here, Binks, here! Want to play, do you! Good dog! Go, get it, Boy!"

He tossed a stone up the bank and Binks dashed after it and brought it back, panting and joyful, to Uncle Bob's feet.

"Go, get it, Boy!" Uncle Bob called again; but this time he threw the stone over the fence on to the little bridge. "Watch, Polly!" he said.

Binks darted for the stone. He jumped up to the latch of the gate. His weight fell against it as the latch gave way, and as he leaped joyfully through, the gate swung back and stood wide open!

"O Uncle Bob!" cried Polly, jumping up and down with excitement, "Do you mean — Was it *Binks*?"

Uncle Bob nodded with twinkling

eyes. "Binks is the rogue, I think!" he said.

"I was looking at the latch this morning, and I saw Binks' little foot-prints in the soft earth. This isn't the first time he's done that trick, you may be sure! And if he was about here the day that Lucy fell in the brook—"

"He was!" cried Polly, dancing with eagerness. "I saw him! Come, let's ask Noreen, quick!"

She was flying away to the house before Uncle Bob could get up the bank. "O Noreen!" she cried, bursting into the room where Noreen was sitting in a forlorn bunch by the window. "*Wasn't* Binks down in the garden the day Lucy fell in the brook?"

"Why, yes," said Noreen. "He

was playing with sticks and things. I remember, because once he ran after my ball."

"I knew it!" cried Polly, clapping her hands. "O Noreen, it wasn't you that left the gate open, it was Binks! Uncle Bob found out! He —"

"Sh-h!" Madame stood behind Polly with her finger on her lip. She came in softly and shut the door. "It's true, Noreen dear," she said, smiling, and Polly saw that there were tears in her eyes. "Polly's uncle has been telling me about it, and I am so happy to think that it wasn't your carelessness, after all, that has made us this trouble! You mustn't fret any more, Noreen. Everybody believes you, dear, and is sorry for all you have suffered."

Poor Noreen hardly knew what to do in her joy. "I am very glad, Madame," she stammered, and she stooped down all of a sudden and kissed Madame's hand in her pretty way, with a little burst of tears. But when Madame was gone, she hugged the breath almost out of Polly's little body.

"You darling darling!" she cried. "I'll love you as long as I live!"

And then Miss Dora had to be told, and Miss Minns and the girls, and the news even leaked out into the kitchen, where Annie told Susan and Susan told Eliza, and Eliza, who was very tender-hearted, put twice as many raisins as usual into the pudding for dinner. A wave of happiness seemed to run shining through the house; and some tiny

ripple of it must have reached Lucy lying on her little bed, for news came down to the girls that evening that for the first time she was really better. Polly told Uncle Bob about it herself when he came up after tea from the hotel in the village where he was staying.

“And a pig of a hotel it is!” said Uncle Bob, pretending to grumble, and not to care at all for the good news about Lucy. But Polly, giving him a reproachful hug, was probably the happiest little girl in the whole country.

Three days Uncle Bob stayed at the pig of a hotel, and every day he came marching up to the Maples after school, the dearest and most splendid knight of an uncle that ever was; and he and Polly told each other everything they

could think of, and he brought candy and flowers for her to share with her mates, and told them stories that made all their hair stand on end with excitement!

And that was not all. For he and Madame did a lot of talking and telephoning and telegraphing between times, and on the evening of the second day, a carriage drove up to the Maples and brought a pretty, fair-haired, delicate lady who immediately rushed upstairs to Lucy Dean's room; and Lucy was so overjoyed to see her mother — for of course it couldn't possibly have been any one in the world but Lucy Dean's mother — that she sat up on the spot and demanded chicken broth for supper. When word of that was spread through the house,

everybody went about with such shining looks that the sun had hard work to keep up his reputation outside!

And *that* was not all. For on the third day, Uncle Bob asked Madame if she did not think that girls who had been through such a very trying time did not need a very special holiday; and when Madame agreed, he took the entire flock, with Miss Dora and Miss Minns to help, to town, and treated them to a royal luncheon and a matinee at the theater, with a rose for every girl and two for the ladies.

"It's lucky you don't send for your knight often," he sighed, wiping his brow, when he came up to say good-by to Polly the next morning. "This gay life would be quite too much for your old Uncle Bob!"

"I can't send for you often," said Polly. "You said only once!"

"So I did," agreed Uncle Bob. "Well now, Polly Wogg, I had a letter this morning from Aunt Sue, and what do you think! She says Grandmamma is ever so much better, and they have taken a nice apartment in Washington, and if a certain little niece of hers would like to leave school and go and stay with them the rest of the year, she thinks it could be arranged."

There was quite a long silence after this. Polly and Uncle Bob were sitting on the front steps, for the weather had turned suddenly warm, as it has a way of doing in March, and the sunshine was bright and soft.

Red buds were all over the maple trees, and dandelions poked up their

yellow heads in all the sunny places on the lawn. The girls were in the school-room, and the sound of their voices came out through the open windows, Madame's among the rest, very sweet and clear. Not far away Miss Dora was standing bare-headed in the sunshine, talking to Thomas, who was raking the drive. Noreen was inside — darling Noreen, the dearest of little school-mammas; Bunty, Lucy, Gwen, Alice, — Polly thought of them all. She even thought of Miss Minns, and of Taddles and Annie and Eliza and Susan. How could she go away and leave them all, now when spring was just coming and Lucy was getting well and there were gardens to make and all sorts of important things to do! And Noreen — well, probably Noreen decided it,

she and the ring. The blue stone, twinkling there in the sun, seemed to say that its work was not quite done!

“Well?” said Uncle Bob, waiting.

Polly turned the ring on her finger.

“Uncle Bob, dear,” she said, “I think if you don’t mind, I’d rather stay here.”

CHAPTER IX

So of course Polly stayed. And there was only one more time when she even thought of such a thing as sending for her knight.

"You're such a clever little girl about guessing at the right time for a message," Uncle Bob said when he left her, "that I'll have to give you one more chance. Send for me again if you're sure you need me, and I'll come."

And Polly *was* sure. She — but dear me, that was way over in June! Before that there had been any number of happy spring days.

Lucy got well, and Binks was forgiven, and Noreen's dimples, hidden so

Polly and the Wishing-R

long, came out and danced merrily than ever. She grew so thankful, too, and so careful, after her lesson, remembering those wretched days when nobody trusted her, that if Polly had not already come to be an independent little body who laughed at help, she would have been really spoiled by her devoted school-mamma.

As the weather grew warm, Polly had her lessons out-of-doors, and that was simply delightful. And there were picnics and walks and frolics. Polly was promoted in her lessons right along, and had a Third Reader now that she simply adored. And then, one bright, wonderful day in June, there was Commencement, when the girls all wore their lovely white dresses and the house was filled with sunshine

lly and the Wishing-Ring

vers and with mothers and
and uncles and aunts and
ins, who came pouring in from
sides to see the doings.

In the morning there were recitations and songs in the big schoolroom, and in the evening dancing and music and ice cream and bright Japanese lanterns bobbing and twinkling on the veranda and among the trees on the lawn; and Polly sat up late and enjoyed everything as much as the big girls did. And it was on the very day after that that she came so near writing one of those desperate little notes to Uncle Bob.

The fun and the excitement were all over. The lanterns hung limp among the trees, and the flowers were faded in the rooms. All day the girls

had been finishing up their packing and the expressman had been carrying off their trunks. Bunty was gone, Gwen and Alice were gone, and Noreen was going.

That was the hardest thing of all. Noreen was not going home; she had been invited, she said, to go to the seashore with some friends, and she kept talking about it in the most exasperating way to Polly, who was to stay at the Maples. Grandmamma was ill again, and Aunt Sue had written that she couldn't possibly take Polly quite yet, though she hoped to be able to pretty soon.

Polly's heart sank lower and lower in her breast. She took Rose-Marie and her Third Reader at last, and went out and sat in the grape-arbor by herself

where she couldn't hear the joyful flurry of preparation; and there Noreen found her, dancing out with her eyes sparkling and her cheeks glowing.

"Where are you, Polly dear?" she cried. "You mustn't run away and leave me when I'm going away so soon! Oh, it's going to be perfectly *splendiferous*, Polly! You can't guess! We're going in bathing every day, and we're going to have a boat of our own and go sailing. Don't you just *love* sailing, Polly?"

Poor Polly did not answer. "It isn't very kind, I do think," she said, when Noreen had flown into the house again, walking away with her head very high and her poor little heart very sore. "I wouldn't talk that way to any one, Rose-Marie, I

know I wouldn't, — even to Miss Minns, — if I was going to the sea-shore and she had to stay at school. I could bear it better if Noreen wasn't so — so unthinkful ! ”

Then the thought of Uncle Bob popped into her head, and for one whole minute she thought she must write to him. He would surely come, and he would manage somehow to take her away, so that she need not be left behind all by herself. But thoughts like this did not stay very long in Polly's head these days.

By the time she had reached the back door, where Eliza, shaking out a duster, nodded to her with a perfectly beaming smile, she had begun to think that maybe this was not a time of greatest need, after all ; and by the

time she reached the front door, which Annie opened for her with another perfectly beaming smile, she had given up the idea entirely. But she did wonder why everybody need look so provokingly happy just at this trying time. And she had not quite forgiven Noreen. So when Noreen rushed at her right there in the hall and cried, "O Polly! My friends have come for me — isn't it lovely! Do come in and see them!" Polly drew back with a very dignified air.

"Thank you, Noreen," she said, going on past the living-room door. "But I don't think I care to —"

That sentence was never finished, for Polly glanced through into the library as she passed, and stopped short. The next minute the Third

Reader went under the piano, and Rose-Marie into the fireplace, — where fortunately there wasn't any fire, or she would have been burned alive, poor child! — and Polly was rushing headlong into the arms of somebody who rushed to meet her, and who held her tight, with her lips smiling and the bright tears spilling over her eyes.

“*Mother!*” cried Polly, too astonished to breathe.

“O Polly darling!” cried Mother, hugging her tighter still. “I didn't dare to let you know, because I was so afraid something might happen! But Father was so much better that he let me come, and we're going to take you away for a little trip, Uncle Bob and I —”

What! Yes, if there wasn't Uncle

Bob himself, popping out from behind the door, where he said he'd nearly died trying to hold his breath! And Madame was there, too, looking on and laughing as if she was as happy as the rest of these crazy people.

"And oh, how tall you are, my Polly!" cried Mother. "And how well you look!" For Polly was not a pale little girl any more, but as rosy as Noreen herself. "We're going to take Noreen, too, if you'd like it," Mother went on. "We know all about how good she has been to you, and —"

"But Noreen's going with her friends!" cried Polly. "She told me so — to the seashore!"

"We're her friends, Polly Wogg," laughed Uncle Bob. "And we *are*

going to the seashore, aren't we, little school-mamma!"

And there was Noreen, coming in very shy and sparkling, and so delighted that the secret was out.

"Did you know all the time, Noreen?" demanded Polly.

"All the time!" said Noreen. "For a week. Madame told me, and I thought I should burst if I couldn't tell you, Polly!"

"And Annie knew, and Eliza," said Polly, slowly. "That was why they laughed. And Miss Dora —"

Yes, of course they knew, all of them, and everybody in the house was happy in Polly's happiness. There was no time to lose, for they were to take the train that very afternoon; so Miss Dora and Annie flew upstairs and

packed Polly's trunk, while Mother talked to Madame. And it was amazing to see how Polly waited on them, and how she dressed herself and tied up her own hair, and the capable way in which she got the things ready for her own little bag, and how she thought of Mother's comfort, and remembered to leave good-by and her love — and the Baa-lamb — for Miss Minns, who was out.

“I told you it would make a little woman of her!” said Uncle Bob to Mother. But to Polly he said, as they were driving away in the bright June sunshine, — and if you'll believe me, that very same old gentleman was sitting in the corner of the stage, chuckling to himself just as he had done on the day when Polly first saw the

Maples! "I see the young lady with the baby has found her tongue," said the old gentleman; and Polly stopped chattering to smile at him happily—to Polly Uncle Bob said, when she had stopped waving to Madame and Miss Dora, who stood waving back on the steps, and to the girls, who poked their heads out of the windows to call "Good-by, Polly! See you next year!" and to Taddles, whose black and yellow tail, all fluffed up with excitement, was the last thing she saw as they drove through the iron gates,—*then* Uncle Bob said to Polly, "Well, and did the wishing-ring work all right, Polly Wogg?"

"Yes, it did, Uncle Bob," said Polly.
"Always. How did it do it?"

"Well," said Uncle Bob again, taking

off his glasses and looking at them thoughtfully, "happy things are very apt to happen to little girls who are looking out for them. That's one thing. And love is the very best kind of a cure for most kinds of trouble. That's another thing. And as for the third, it's pretty safe to say that the right time for asking help is when you've done the very best you know how yourself first, and especially when the help is for somebody else, — see?"

"Yes, I see," said Polly.

She looked over at Mother, sitting opposite to her, so smiling and beautiful, and at Noreen, her loving face all dimples and joy, and settled back in her seat with a happy sigh.

"So now," said Uncle Bob, suddenly, "you don't need the ring any more!"

Polly smiled up at him, and shut her hand tight over that twinkling little blue stone.

“Well, I guess!” she said. And the old gentleman in the corner chuckled till he had to undo his necktie to keep from choking!

